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ABSTRACT

This course is intended to teach students enrolled in an adult high school diploma program one method for composing a short (five-paragraph) essay that can be used in situations where writing is part of a qualifying test, such as the General Educational Development (GED) exam. The course also offers background information about the GED writing test and how it is scored. The course contains nine lessons, each of which consists of examples, information sheets, activities, and assignments. The following lessons are included: (1) "Writing to Qualify"; (2) "Being Sure #1: Of the Assignment"; (3) "Being Sure #2: Of Your Choices"; (4) "Looking Back for a Moment"; (5) "First Paragraph as the Starting Point"; (6) "Paragraphs Two, Three, and Four"; (7) "Ending the Essay"; (8) "Finishing Your Work"; and (9) "Some Highlights of the Process." (KC)

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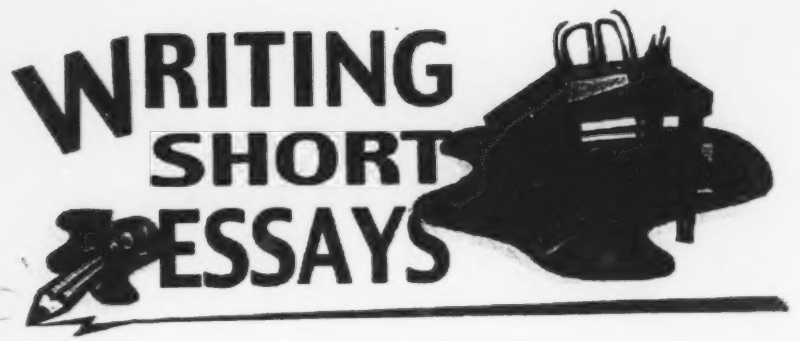

About This Course
Information for Teachers

This course shows students one method for composing a short (5 paragraphs) essay that can be used in situations where writing is part of a qualifying test, such as the GED exam. The course also offers background information about the GED writing test and how it is scored.

Target Population
Students studying for the GED exam or for another type of qualifying test.

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Course Author

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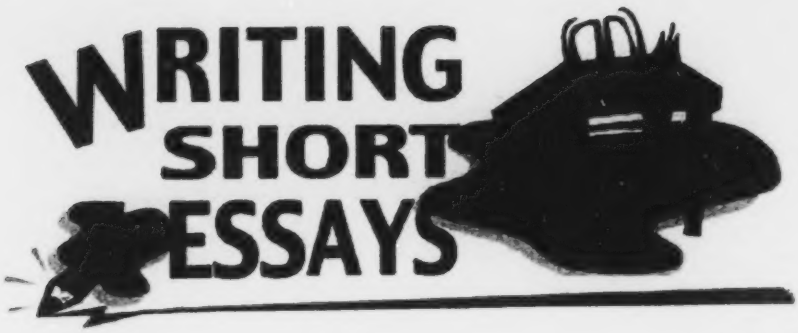


Introduction

Blankness

I hate facing a blank sheet of paper that I'm supposed to write on. I hate even more facing a blank screen on my computer. That little marker sits there and blinks at me as if it's saying "Get going, get going, get going." Or as if it's making fun of me, saying "You're not going to get started. You're not going to get started."

Any number of writers have said something like this. The feelings probably come to nearly everyone who writes, even to experienced writers who write almost every day. And the feelings come to people who create other things, too: a painter facing a blank canvas, a muralist starting a new wall, a songwriter or composer looking at a fresh sheet, a cook with no recipes, a carver with an unformed chunk of wood.

A blank page or screen shows that nothing has been put down yet. In that way, the page or screen is very real or actual. But the blankness also can stand in for deeper feelings: that we won't be able to get anything on the page (or screen, or canvas, etc.). A blank mind is even scarier than a blank page.

✓Overcoming Blankness

This course will give you ideas and strategies for overcoming the blankness you might feel when you have to write a short essay, for example as part of a GED examination, a school or work application, or other qualifying test.

You won't necessarily use the exact ideas and strategies given in this course. You may have your own ideas and strategies.

The big idea, however, is to have *a strategy that works for you.* And the fact is, most people don't have one.

✓Mapping Out Your Writing

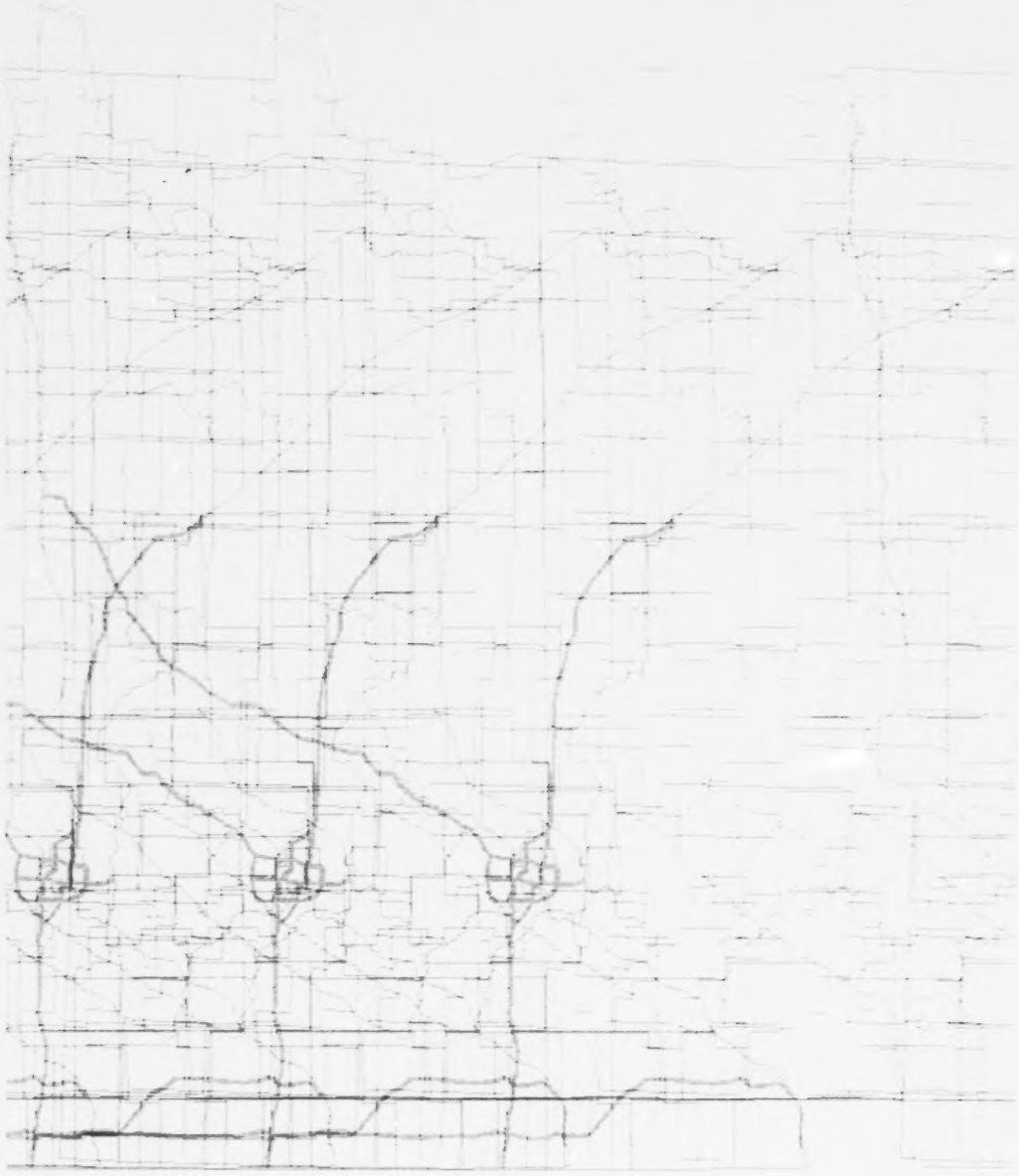
Some of the work of writing a short essay is similar to making a map. Making a map includes staying within some boundaries or basic outline, selecting the details to show, and showing the details in some understandable way.

You could, for example, start with a map showing only the outline of the state of Minnesota:

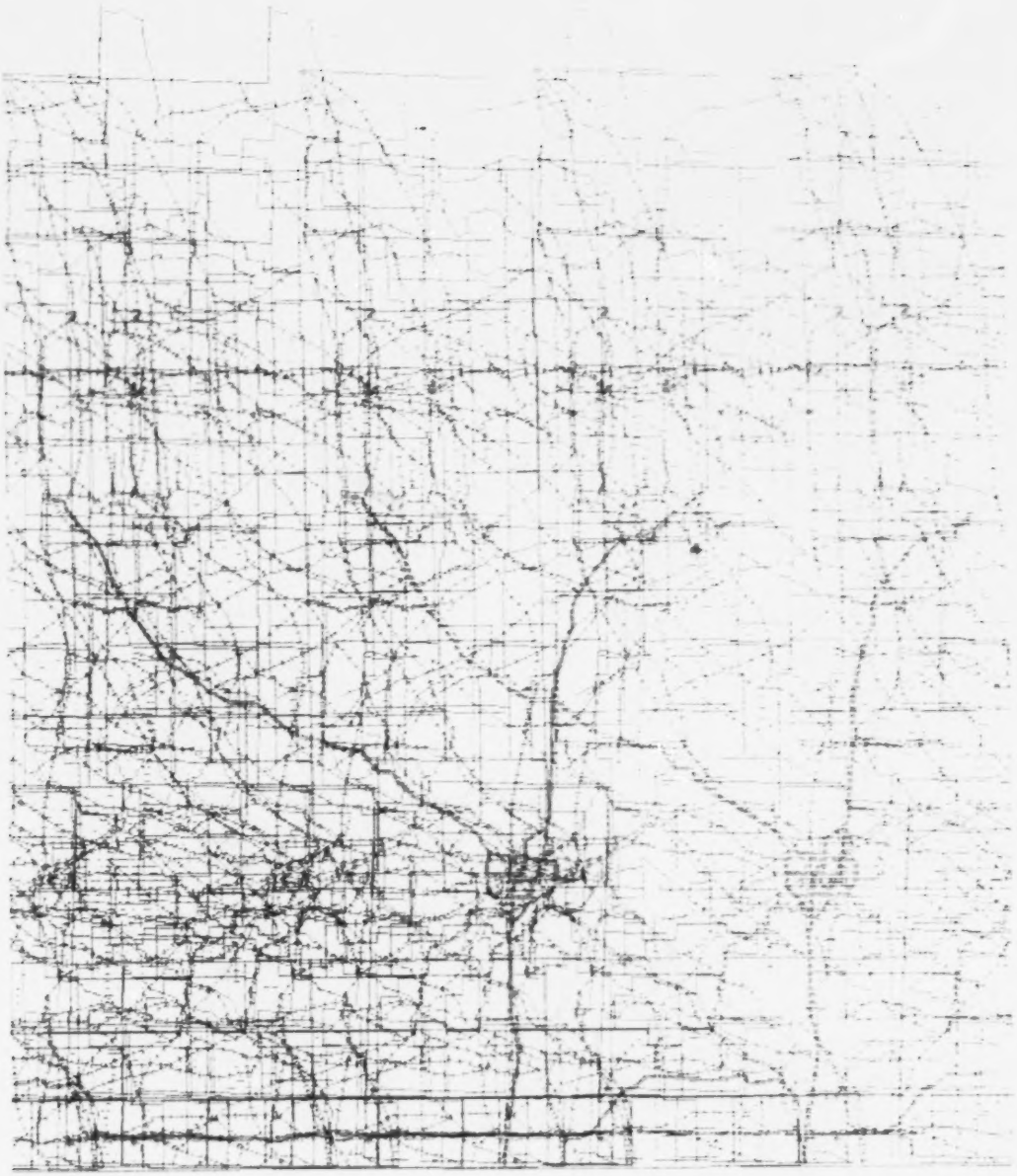
This

This much tells a map reader "This is about Minnesota." Considering the countless places that could be mapped, getting the outline specifies the possibilities a great deal.

Additional information categories add more specification. Imagine that the map-maker wants to show some surface transportation possibilities in the state. Here's another version of the map, this time showing interstate highways in Minnesota:



Railroads are another possible method of surface transportation. So here's version three of the map, this time adding railroad routes:

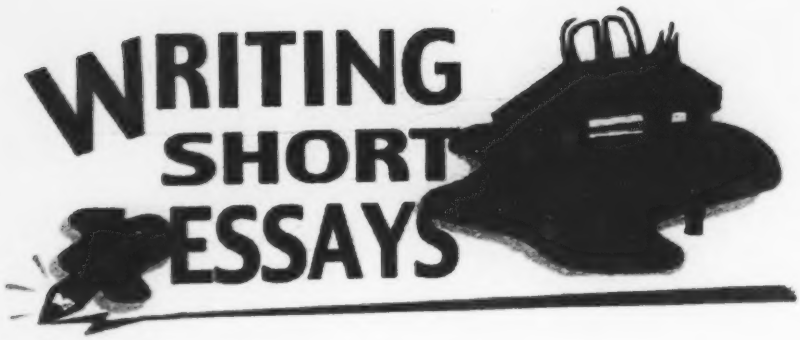


Water routes could be used for surface transportation, too. So here's a fourth version with lakes and rivers shown:

The strategy you'll learn in this course is like these map-making steps. You'll decide on a big idea--similar to a map's outline--and fill it in with three supporting points. And you'll practice some techniques for clearly arranging what you decide to use.

✓Going On

In Lesson One you'll get some background about essays used as tests. The lesson also introduces the main goals of the course.



LESSON ONE:

Writing to Qualify

Each year in the United States approximately 15 percent of the people who finish high school graduate with a GED diploma. Every one of them had to pass the writing examination in order to graduate.

Somewhere around 65 percent of GED graduates, along with thousands of other high school graduates, plan to go on to more schooling. Some colleges, universities, and trade schools require applicants to write an essay as part of the admission process; many more require a writing test to place students in beginning courses.

Thousands of people apply for jobs or promotions each year. Many employers use an applicant's statement or other piece of writing as part of the application.

In each of these cases, people are showing whether they are qualified for something: qualified to get a GED diploma, enter a given school, take a particular kind of course, get a job, or earn a promotion. In each case, writing gets used to help decide whether a person is qualified. These are very special and very important kinds of writing.

You might find that situations where you write to qualify for something share a few qualities or circumstances, such as these:

- You're trying to qualify for something you really want; it means a lot to you. So the writing is more important than a single school assignment or report.
- You're probably writing for a reader (or readers) that you don't know very well. Often you'll write for readers that you don't know at all and never see.
- You're probably given a topic and other directions. This might be done strictly in writing and without any chance for you to ask questions.
- You might have time or length requirements, or both.

For Instance: Writing the GED Essay

All of the four points listed above apply to the essay part of your GED writing exam. You obviously want to pass the exam and earn your diploma; it's important to you. You don't know who will read your essay. (Later you'll read about how the essays get a score, which will give you a little to go on.) You will be given a topic to write

about or a couple of topics to choose from; you won't pick your own topic. You will be given to 45 minutes to do the entire essay and told to make it at least 200 words long.

✓Some Background Information About the GED Writing Skills Test

The Writing Skills Test includes two parts and the essay is Part 2. Part 1, like all of the other GED examinations, is a set of multiple choice questions, in this case 55 of them. Questions are about equally divided among three kinds of problems: content errors caused by sentence structure mistakes, use of words and word forms, and mechanics such as capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. You will have up to 75 minutes for Part 1.

In Part 2 you will respond in writing to a situation or issue. Situations or issues are ones that adults will be familiar with; they don't require any special knowledge or experience. For instance, the topic might ask you to describe how you'd encourage a friend to finish school or give your opinion about whether kids should have the right to use any site on the Internet. Later in this course you'll see more specific examples and learn some techniques for planning how to write about them. You will have 45 minutes to complete Part 2.

At least two trained readers will give your essay a score ranging from one to six (with no decimals or fractions allowed, only whole numbers). Those scores are added together, then added to the score for Part 1. The total is used to get your final score for the Writing Skills Test. The essay score and multiple choice score are always combined; they are never reported separately. The essay makes up about 35 percent of the combined score; the multiple choice accounts for the remaining 65 percent.

A third person will read and score your essay if the first two readers disagree on your score by more than one point. (For instance if one scores it 6 and the other 4.) A formula is used to adjust for having three readers instead of two.

This style of grading, in which the entire piece of writing gets just one score, is very similar to the familiar A, B, C, D, and F (or E). But when more than one reader is used, it's vital that they agree most of the time. To get reliable results, readers are trained in advance and regularly reminded of the standards to use. They're also told some things about what to look for and what to ignore. For instance, they're told to look for organization and to ignore handwriting.

Other essay tests, especially ones for college placement, use the same basic approach as the GED; that is, they use two or more readers, train readers on what to look for and how to use the scoring scale, and assign a single topic.

Needed: A Plan for Essay Writing

If you're like most people who are preparing to take the GED Writing Skills test, you will do better if you have at least a general plan for writing the essay. This course is designed to teach you one plan that you can use. The plan involves a set of techniques, general enough to fit a variety of topics and specific enough to be useful, that will help you do these things:

- Make the best use of the time you're given
- Identify and understand the topic you're assigned to write about
- Recognize what invitations or limits the assignment makes
- Make decisions about how you will treat the topic
- Choose main points and supporting details

- Draft and arrange your essay
- End your essay effectively
- Check and improve your work before running out of time

✓"What Will I Write About?"

If you ask what you will write about in the GED essay, you might get any of several honest answers. One legitimate answer is you will write about the topic you're given in the test. Although that might sound obvious, it's still important.

As one way to help you with that reality, throughout this course you'll find examples of what you might be assigned. Usually the examples will be at the end of a lesson. Getting some experience with possible topics should help you find out that you can write about them, at least after some practice and advice. ***It's worth a lot to go into the test with that confidence***.

So here's your first example of a topic assignment:

> **Studies say that most children spend three hours watching television for every hour they spend in school. What do you think are important consequences of this pattern? Do you think parents should change the television-watching habits of their children?**

And here's one more example:

> **Computers have influenced many things about modern life. Describe some ways they have influenced your life. Explain how you have reacted to these influences.**

(Pay attention to how you first reacted to these examples because your reactions will be the topic in one of the assignments for this lesson.)

The next lesson will give you some more answers to that basic question "What will I write about?"

Assignment for Lesson 1

✓Part One

You read about situations in which writing is used as one way to decide whether a person qualifies for a job, a diploma, school admission, or similar thing.

Now write one paragraph (or more) telling about a specific experience of qualifying by doing. The doing can be writing or something else. Here are some examples:

- Driving a car or truck with an examiner to qualify for a driver's license
- Doing CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) on a dummy to qualify for a certificate
- Auditioning for a music group like a band or choir; auditioning for a part in a play
- Demonstrating work to qualify for a job (such as taping sheet rock, preparing an omelet, using a computer program, cleaning a milking machine, backing a truck, and so on)
- Trying out for a sport team

Use one of the examples or pick another situation.

Write about something that you did or that you observed very closely.

Describe the situation including who was involved, where and when it took place, what qualification was involved. Tell how the person (you or the person you observed) seemed to react to the situation. Explain how it turned out.

✓Part Two

The reading gives you some information about how the GED essay is scored. Describe what you know about this, using your own words and examples. Give your opinion about the scoring. If you want to, tell about your reactions to the scoring process.

✓Part Three

Near the end of the reading you saw two examples of GED essay assignments. Think back to what the reading said about assignments not requiring any special knowledge. Write a paragraph giving and explaining your opinion on whether the sample assignments can be done without any special knowledge.

✓Part Four

Your GED Hit list

Later in this course you'll find suggestions for a schedule to use when writing the GED essay. The last part of that schedule is the time for going back over your work and making any improvements you find are needed. To make the most of the review and revise steps, it helps to know if you have some habits or uncertainties that interfere with your writing.

So during this course, you'll try using a personal list of writing problems you want to solve or avoid. Even more to the point, think of this as a list of problems you promise yourself you **will not have** when you write your GED essay. For most people, this approach works best if it starts with getting the list written down and turning it into a mental list through regular use.

Keeping Your List

The general approach is simple enough: keep a list of the problems you, your teacher, and any other readers notice in the writing you do for this course.

Someone taking this course might, for example, have written the sentence

> ***I should of been more careful when picking out a computer.***

To which a teacher might have responded

> ***Change this to "I should have been more careful Ö"***

When talking, most English speakers would shorten up the combination ***should have*** into the contraction ***should've***, which sounds as if it would be written ***should of***. But in writing, it needs to be either ***should have*** or ***should've***.

So ***should of/should have*** goes onto the list of things to check. Once it's on the list, the writer might remember

encountering the problem before.

You and others who read your work may notice any number of problems. [You and others may notice strong points too. But for now, the list sticks to problems.] You might be in the habit of misspelling certain words or letter combinations, such as *fourty* instead of *forty, becuase* instead of *because* or *wieght* instead of *weight*. Maybe you use sentences such as *Gina had her baby girl in September my daughter was born that month too,* and had a teacher or other reader tell you it's a run-on sentence that has to be fixed. Maybe you have been told that too many of your sentences are very short and very simple or that many are too long and needlessly complicated.

As you go along with the list, you might see some ways of organizing it into categories. Spelling is a category that almost everyone will use; most people have at least a few words that need checking. Punctuation is another category most people will use. So are capitalization, subject-verb agreement, and verb forms (such as different tenses). Vocabulary - questions of word meaning and shades of meaning - come along regularly in everyone's writing, too.

You get a good set of categories if you think over the material covered in the multiple choice part of the GED English exam. The test asks questions about all the categories just mentioned: spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and so on.

Your teacher may have suggestions or directions for organizing your list.

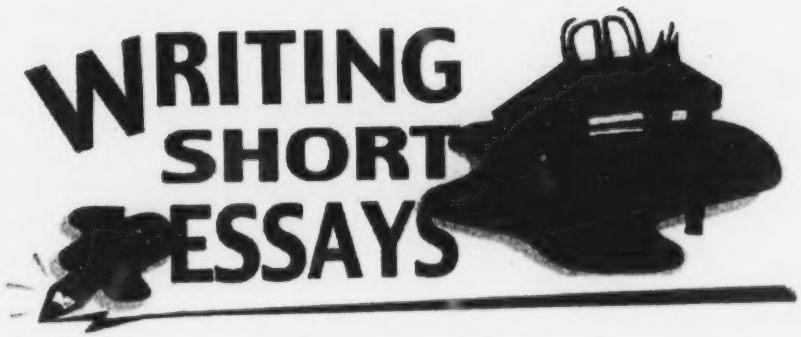
Making a Mental Checklist

Toward the end of the course you will find a lesson devoted to going over your essay and making improvements before handing it in. Part of that work involves checking for the things you have on your list and taking care of any those mistakes. However, you can't take a written list with you into the exam, so you'll have to depend on what you know and remember. You will have to use a mental checklist.

A mental checklist can work if you focus on your own list instead of trying to remember a huge list from a textbook, software program, or course.

Start Your Own List Now

Start by making a list of problems that you know you have with your writing. List words that you consistently misspell or other problems you or your teacher have noticed in the past. You'll be asked to go back to this list and add to it in several other lessons in this course.



LESSON TWO

Being Sure #1: Of the Assignment

You will want to be sure ? at least reasonably sure ? of a number of things as you do your GED essay. So the next parts of this course will take up those matters, beginning with the first thing you should do when you start working on your essay: get the assignment straight.

If your essay doesn't actually do the assignment, chances are it won't get a good score no matter how understandable, interesting, and mechanically correct it is. Although that might seem harsh or unfair, readers do react that way; in fact, they are trained to react that way.

Two Examples of Missing the Assignment

Writers can miss the assignment in many different ways. To see two fairly common problems, let's use one of the sample assignments you read at the end of Lesson 1. It went like this:

Studies say that most children spend three hours watching television for every hour they spend in school. What do you think are important consequences of this pattern? Do you think parents should change the television-watching habits of their children?

Suppose that a writer started with these sentences and continued along the same path for the rest of the essay:

> Children couldn't possibly watch three hours of television for every hour they spend in school. Studies like these, probably made up by school teachers, say things that just defy common sense. Most kids probably spend at least five hours in school. That means they'd have to spend 15 hours watching television. When do they sleep?

As you can tell, the writer doesn't think much of the kind of studies mentioned and attacks them vigorously. The

problem, of course, is that the assignment doesn't ask for an attack on the studies; it doesn't even ask for an opinion of them. Instead, it asks writers to accept what the studies say for the moment and then write responses to two questions.

This writer is making the mistake of writing about the wrong things --which also means <u>not writing</u> about what is assigned.

Now look at another sample, one starting with these sentences:

> Parents can do at least two things that will change a child's tv viewing for the better. One is to watch with the child some of the time. The other is to encourage other activities that replace time in front of the tube.

Suppose this essay went on from here to explain how to watch with a child and what that might accomplish, then to describe a few ways to encourage other activities, and ended with a paragraph saying that a parent will be most influential by being an example instead of preaching.

In many respects, this would be a strong essay. It uses a pattern that's easy to follow, makes its points directly, and its spelling, punctuation, and other mechanics are all right.

But this essay doesn't include anything about important consequences of watching a lot of television, and that was specifically asked for in the assignment.

✓<u>Reading Comes Before Writing</u>

Read the assignment, more than once, before doing anything else. To get your reading focused, ask and answer these questions about the assignment:

✓Is any of this background information?

✓What words or phrases tell me what to do? (Words such as *describe, compare, explain, think, tell, illustrate, show, define, support,* and so on.)

✓Are there any hints or suggestions?

✓What choices or decisions do I have to make?

Suppose these questions were asked of the assignment about television-watching, which, you remember, goes like this:

Studies say that most children spend three hours watching television for every hour they spend in school. What do you think are important consequences of this pattern? Do you think parents should change the television-watching habits of their children?

You might reasonably come up with answers like this:

- The first sentence is background material. It's information I'm given to help raise the questions that come next.
- There are two questions in the assignment. I have to write about both.

- I'm asked to think about consequences of kids watching tv three times as much as they go to school. Also asked to think of **important** consequences, not all consequences.
- It asks whether I think parents should change tv watching habits of their kids. Again, one key word is *think*.
- I have to choose which consequences to write about; I have to decide whether parents should try to change their children's tv watching.

✓Using the Questions With a Different Assignment

If the questions are actually useful, they should work with just about any writing assignment you can think of. So if the sample assignment -- about tv viewing -- gets changed in some important ways, the answers should be different too. Suppose you had this assignment:

Some studies have said that children spend three hours watching television for every one hour they spend in school. Explain how that difference might be possible, taking into account the number of days kids can watch television and other factors. Give and support your opinion of studies such as these.

These, you may remember, are the questions:

✓Is any of this background information?

✓What words or phrases tell me what to do?

✓Are there any hints or suggestions?

✓What choices or decisions do I have to make?

You might come up with answers such as:

- The first sentence is background. It gives me the starting point for the assignment.
- Two words or phrases tell me what to do: *explain* and *give and support your opinion*
- The last part of sentence 2 is a suggestion. It suggests I take into account the number of days kids can watch television.
- I'll have to decide a few things. One is what is the assignment getting at when it suggests taking into account the number of days kids can watch tv. Another is what other factors I might explain. I'll also have to decide on my opinion of studies like these and what supports my opinion.

The important point here is that the questions stay the same but the answers change, depending on the assignment.

Assignment Patterns

If you used the general questions on a bunch of essay assignments you'd soon start to see some things happening over and over. In other words, you'd start to see some pattern in how the assignments are put together even though they deal with different topics.

For instance, the two assignments you read and wrote about at the end of Lesson 1 started with these sentences:

✓Studies say that most children spend three hours watching television for every hour they spend in school.

✓Computers have influenced many things about modern life.

Other assignments might start with sentences like these:

✓On the average, an American family moves every 4.5 years.

✓People born since 1970 will change jobs at least six times during their working lives, if current patterns continue.

✓Most people can remember times during their childhood when some adult was a very strong influence.

Some parts of a pattern: You can expect GED essay assignments to have a background statement similar to these. Usually it will be the first sentence. Sometimes it will be more than one sentence. The background statement almost always introduces the basic topic you will work with in the essay.

To see where an assignment goes from the background statement, look at what the two assignments at the end of Lesson 1 went on to say. The new material is in blue print.

✓Studies say that most children spend three hours watching television for every hour they spend in school. What do you think are important consequences of this pattern? Do you think parents should change the television-watching habits of their children?

✓Computers have influenced many things about modern life. Describe some ways they have influenced your life. Explain how you have reacted to these influences.

You probably can imagine one or two ways that each of the other sample assignments would go along.

✓On the average, an American family moves every 4.5 years. Think of someone ? maybe you ? who's moved three times or more. Describe the moves and tell why they were made. Explain some of the most important changes the moves resulted in.

✓People born since 1970 will change jobs at least six times during their working lives, if current patterns continue. Think of someone ? maybe you ? who's changed jobs three times or more. Tell about at least three job changes and why each was made. Explain some of the most important results of the job changes.

✓Most people can remember times during their childhood when some adult was a very strong influence. Tell about a time when that happened to you. Or tell of a time when a child you know was strongly influenced by adult.

Some more parts of the pattern: Expect GED essay topics to be set up as situations or problems you comment on. Almost always, you will be asked to use your own experience as the foundation. In general, you will explain a situation or give a point of view about a problem.

Often, but not always, the assignment will give you some suggestion about how to handle the topic situation or problem. Now look at the same five assignments with a suggestion added to each of them. Suggestions are in red print.

✓Studies say that most children spend three hours watching television for every hour they spend in school. What do you think are important consequences of this pattern? Do you think parents should change the television-watching habits of their children? Most of the time it will be best if you write approximately the same amount about each question.

✓Computers have influenced many things about modern life. Describe some ways they have influenced your life. Explain how you have reacted to these influences. You might think of influences on your work, recreation, home life, and relationships.

✓On the average, an American family moves every 4.5 years. Think of someone ? maybe you ? who's moved three times or more. Describe the moves and tell why they were made. Explain some of the most important changes the moves resulted in. Don't worry if the moves didn't involve a great distance. Focus on what changed.

✓People born since 1970 will change jobs at least six times during their working lives, if current patterns continue. Think of someone ? maybe you ? who's changed jobs three times or more. Tell about at least three job changes why each was made. Explain some of the most important results of the job changes. You may find this easier if you focus on jobs that you've had for a relatively long time instead of on short-term, temporary ones.

✓Most people can remember times during their childhood when some adult was a very strong influence. Think of a time when that happened to you. Or think of a time when a child you know was strongly influenced by adult. Keep in mind that the influence might have been positive, negative, or mixed.

Suggestions usually are meant to help you think of things to write about. They give some hints or reminders. Even if you don't follow the suggestions, think them over. Sometimes that's exactly what the suggestion is there to accomplish: encourage your thoughts.

Assignment for Lesson 2

✓Part One

The reading said that GED essay assignments follow a pattern. They usually begin with a background statement introducing the topic. Next, they either tell the writer to explain a situation or give their point of view about a problem. And often they then make a suggestion to guide the writer.

Try your hand at writing some assignments following this pattern. Be sure to include all three parts: 1) a background statement, 2) either a situation to be explained or a point of view to be given, and 3) a suggestion or more than one.

Label the three parts, like this:

> Nearly everyone has been lost, one time or another. (Background introduction) Explain an experience you have had being lost. (Situation to be explained)
>
> You might think of how it happened, how you reacted, and how it turned out. (Suggestions)

Write three assignments.

✓Part Two

Here are two writing assignments that follow the pattern of most GED essay assignments. The two look almost the same, but when you read them you will find important differences between them.

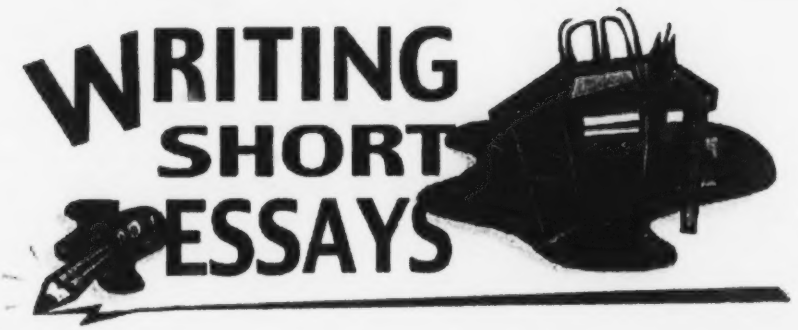
Read the assignments carefully. Pick out two or more differences between them. Imagine that you have been given these assignments. In one or two paragraphs, explain what you would do differently to take care of the differences.

Version One

Recent surveys say that over 60 percent of American high school graduates go on to college or technical school, compared to 40 percent just 25 years ago. Explain what conditions have caused this increase. Use your experience, that of your family, and that of people you know to illustrate.

Version Two

Recent surveys say that over 60 percent of American high school graduates go on to college or technical school, compared to 40 percent just 25 years ago. Give your opinion about whether this trend is healthy and should continue. Think about both social and personal results of the trend.



LESSON THREE

Being Sure # 2: Of Your Choices

Doing the GED Essay presents many different choices and decisions for you to make. You've already met quite a few of them in Lesson 2, because as you think through what an assignment says you automatically start seeing choices and decisions coming along. You probably already can see that you'll have to decide whether you're being asked to explain a situation or present a point of view, to choose what personal experience you can draw on for your essay, decide whether to follow suggestions you're given, and choose examples to use.

Many other choices will come up as well: things like deciding whether that little word should be spelled ***its*** or ***it's***, how long your essay should be, how to word your first sentence, the order in which main ideas should come, whether you should write a clean copy after finishing the actual writing. All that and more.

This lesson will look at some fundamental decisions writers face in the GED Essay; later lessons will go into them in more detail and preview some additional decisions too.

Several of the decisions taken up in this lesson may seem closely related to the thinking you did in Lesson 2. That's by design. After thinking over what the assignment tells you to do, you're ready to make some decisions and move along.

It's a good idea to start making notes about these decisions. They don't need to be elaborate; in fact, they probably should be brief because you have only 45 minutes to finish your essay. Still, making written notes will help you keep moving toward completion.

Your decisions might come in a different sequence or overlap with others You might change one decision and find that means you have to change another one too. All of which is just fine.

Decide Whether the Assignment Says "Explain a Situation" or "Present a Point of View"

As pointed out earlier, GED essay assignments usually can be sorted into two general types: *explain a situation* or *present a point of view*. And usually you won't have much trouble distinguishing one from the other. But even if it's easy to do, it is worthwhile to consciously, intentionally decide because it will make later steps go faster and better. One way to make the decision conscious and intentional is to ask yourself the question "Am I being asked to explain something or give my opinion about something?" After you answer that question, you're done with this basic decision and can move ahead confidently.

If you are not sure of your answer, try checking out some key words that frequently get used in making assignments. The words *describe* or *tell about* are used in many assignments. But they're almost always used in combination with some other key words. For instance, you saw them combined with *explain* in three of the five sample assignments used in the last lesson:

- Computers have influenced many things about modern life. **Describe** some ways they have influenced your life. **Explain** how you have reacted to these influences.

- On the average, an American family moves every 4.5 years. Think of someone ? maybe you ? who's moved three times or more. **Describe** the moves and tell why they were made. **Explain** some of the most important changes the moves resulted in.

- People born since 1970 will change jobs at least six times during their working lives, if current patterns continue. Think of someone ? maybe you ? who's changed jobs three times or more. **Tell about** at least three job changes why each was made. Explain some of the most important results of the job changes.

Here are two assignments where *describe* is used with other key words:

- It's said that children can learn from both success and failure. **Describe** one time that a child you know has learned from success and one time the same child has learned from failure . **Give and support your opinion** about whether the child learned more from the success or from the failure.

- It's said that children can learn from both success and failure. **Describe** at least one specific example of each: learning from a success and learning from a failure. **Compare** the major strength and weakness of each way of learning.

Decide on the Personal Experience You Will Draw On

In order to work at all, GED essay assignments have to be based on general topics. Topics must be ones that a reasonably well-educated adult, such as you, can be expected to know something about and understand. Put in other words, topics must depend on general knowledge, not on specialized information or experience.

The challenge, then, is to recognize what experiences related to the topic you can draw on. Going back to one of the sample assignments, for instance, you would need to recognize a few experiences you've had with children and television viewing, which might include these:

- Times when you wanted to watch television but had to do something else instead, like work or study or take care of another person
- Disagreements you've had with your own children over television watching
- Seeing something on television you didn't want your children to see
- Seeing someone respond to something on television in ways you don't like
- Reading about "v-chips" or other technologies for controlling a television set
- Listening to someone you respect criticize television programming
- Imagining what it's like to be four years old and watch a story about a violent kidnapping
- Thinking over how much your own spending is affected by television advertising

That word "experience" covers a lot of territory; that is, there are many kinds of experience. What you've observed other people doing and what you've imagined can supply you with experiences to use in your writing, even though direct ones might be the first you recognize and recall. You can try asking yourself the following questions as a way to remind yourself to consider different kinds of experience related to the topic:

- **What have I lived through and done myself that's connected to this topic?**
- **What have I personally seen happen to other people?**
- **What have I read (or watched or listened to)?**
- **What have I wondered, thought, or imagined?**

Someone who used these questions with the sample assignment about computers in Lesson 2 might have come up with some notes like those below.

[That assignment went like this: *Computers have influenced many things about modern life. Describe some ways they have influenced your life. Explain how you have reacted to these influences. You might think of influences on your work, recreation, home life, and relationships.*]

1. I had to learn how to use a computer program for analyzing engine performance. Used to be very different.
2. At first ? thought I was too old or not smart enough to use one
3. Found out they're very fast but do only what they're told
4. Watched the kids use them and figured I could do most of what they did
5. Use the computer at home for some personal stuff: getting news, e-mail, planning trips
6. Get lots of phone calls and mail that I know comes from computerized lists (Get this into better words)

7. Engines have lots of sort of small computers in them now
8. I've heard that before long we won't even notice how many computers there are around us; I wonder if that's anything like when gas engines or electric motors were new

Decide How to Use Suggestions

At their best, suggestions will give you some specific new ideas for what to write about. In other words, they'll come up with something you haven't thought of yet.

But in almost all cases, they give you something to compare your list of experiences against. Take a look at the same assignment again ? the one about the influence of computers. The assignment makes this suggestion:

You might think of influences on your work, recreation, home life, and relationships.

In only a minute or two, you could check the eight notes listed above against the categories in the suggestion. For example, you could see that two items on the list might be about things at work, number 1 and number 7, and three might be things from home life: numbers 4, 5, and 6. So you could say that you're already following the suggestion. But you could also get some new ideas by saying to yourself, "I already have two parts of the suggestion represented, work and home life. Now how about computer influences on recreation and relationships?"

Reviewing the Notemaking So Far

By this point in your writing process you have some notes covering these things:

- **What the basic job of the assignment involves, either *explaining a situation* or *presenting a point of view.***
- **Key words used in the assignment, especially those that tell you what to do, such as *describe, tell about, explain, compare, support.***
- **Some of the personal experiences you can draw on when writing.**
- **How to use suggestions, if the assignment makes any.**

Start Deciding on a Big Idea

Beginning with the next lesson you'll learn a series of steps to take as you put your essay on

paper. Those steps build on the thinking and decisions you've learned up to now. The actual writing also builds on one more decision, which you're now ready to start working on: a big idea for your essay.

We're calling this simply a big idea, although it goes by many names. At other times and places you might have heard or read terms such as *thesis, controlling idea, organizing idea, main idea, main point, central idea,* or others that all mean pretty much the same thing. They all say or hint that a short essay, such as the one you'll write for the GED, should have one general idea that ties together the whole piece, a general idea that unifies the essay.

One way to think of the big idea goes like this: What would you say if you could use only one sentence or phrase to tell what your essay is all about?

So imagine that some student writers have been asked that question about the sample assignments used through the last two lessons. You might get answers ? might see big ideas ? such as these:

- Watching television hour after hour has turned most children into people who would rather watch things than do things.
- Computers have influenced how I do my work, communicate with friends, and spend my evenings.
- I have had to move six times during the past eight years, and I do mean I had to move.
- Every time my husband has changed jobs it has been hell for me and the kids.
- Two years ago my only son got a new basketball coach and I think the boy is a better player and a better young man since then.

With big ideas such as these, a writer could, quickly and effectively, plan out a well-organized GED essay.

Assignment for Lesson 3

Part One

As an important step in preparing to write, the lesson suggests you make a list of personal experiences you've had with the assigned topic. The reading gave you four general questions you can ask:

- **What have I lived through and done myself that's connected to this topic?**
- **What have I personally seen happen to other people?**
- **What have I read (or watched or listened to)?**

What have I wondered, thought, or imagined?

Here are three topics that might be used for an essay assignment:

1. Places sometimes are connected to personal feelings. One place might go along with feeling happy and safe; another place might be associated with feeling tense and insecure. Describe a place that you associate with some feeling. Explain how the association might have developed. The place might be a spot in the outdoors, a location in a city or town, or a room in a house or other building.
2. Several states in the U.S. now prohibit young drivers from driving later at night through early morning hours, say 10:00pm until 5:00am. Give and support your opinion of laws like these. Consider results in addition to safety.
3. Americans change jobs much more often than they used to, according to many kinds of evidence. Think of how often you have changed jobs during recent years. (Or think of someone you know well.) Explain the job changes and how the changes affected you. Count it as a job change if you stayed with the same employer but got different responsibilities.

First, pick <u>any two</u> of these assignments.

For <u>each of the two</u> list five or more personal experiences you might be able to use when doing the assignment. In most cases, one or two sentences will be enough to describe the experience.

<u>Part Two</u>

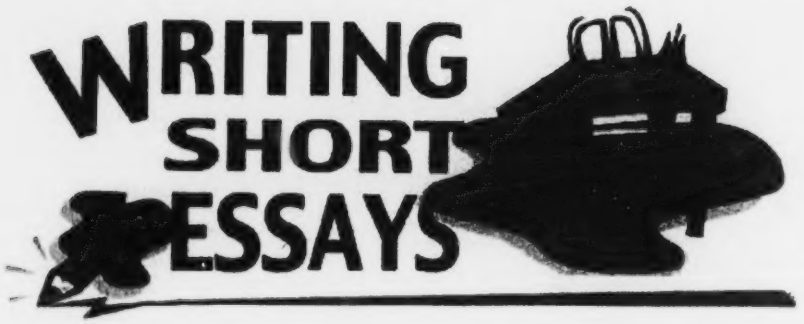
At the end of the reading for Lesson 3 there's a short list of ***big ideas*** that could be used in a GED essay. Each big idea fits a different assignment. For instance, the first big idea fits an assignment about the effects of watching a lot of television.

Here's that list of big ideas:

- Watching television hour after hour has turned most children into people who would rather watch things than do things.
- Computers have influenced how I do my work, communicate with friends, and spend my evenings.
- I have had to move six times during the past eight years, and I do mean I <u>had to move</u>.
- Every time my husband has changed jobs it has been hell for me and the kids.
- Two years ago my only son got a new basketball coach and I think the boy is a better player and a better young man since then.

And here's a list of assignments:

1. Studies say that most children spend three hours watching television for every hour they spend in school. What do you think are important consequences of this pattern? Do you think parents should change the television-watching habits of their children? Most of the time it will be best if you write approximately the same amount about each question.
2. Computers have influenced many things about modern life. Describe some ways they have influenced your life. Explain how you have reacted to these influences. You might think of influences on your work, recreation, home life, and relationships.
3. On the average, an American family moves every 4.5 years. Think of someone ? maybe you ? who's moved three times or more. Describe the moves and tell why they were made. Explain some of the most important changes the moves resulted in. Don't worry if the moves didn't involve a great distance. Focus on what changed.
4. People born since 1970 will change jobs at least six times during their working lives, if current patterns continue. Think of someone ? maybe you ? who's changed jobs three times or more. Tell about at least three job changes why each was made. Explain some of the most important results of the job changes. You may find this easier if you focus on jobs that you've had for a relatively long time instead of on short-term, temporary ones.
5. Most people can remember times during their childhood when some adult was a very strong influence.



LESSON FOUR

Looking Back for a Moment

Before moving into some new topics, think back to what you've done already. You got some information about the GED essay including the general requirements, how it's scored, how long it is supposed to be, and how much time you're given to finish it. You were told that it's important to have a plan in mind for doing the essay and that this course will help you develop your plan. You saw a few sample assignments and in them noticed some features that are frequently used and some key words to be aware of. You were advised to read the assignment carefully and ask a few questions as you read.

You were told it's a good idea to make notes for yourself while you read and think about the assignment, putting onto paper your decisions about what the assignment asks of you, what personal experiences you can draw on, how to use suggestions, and the big idea you'll use to organize and unify your essay.

In Lesson 1 there's a list of things this course is designed to help you learn. As you read through it, you should be able to see that many things on this list already have been introduced:

- Make the best use of the time you're given
- Identify and understand the topic you're assigned to write about
- Recognize what invitations or limits the assignment makes
- Make decisions about how you will treat the topic
- Choose main points and supporting details
- Arrange your essay
- End your essay effectively
- Check and improve your work before running out of time

Watching the Time

So far the course has asked you to think about your essay and make some notes. It hasn't taken up writing the essay itself. In other words, so far the focus has been on preparing to write.

How long should this preparation take? After all, you have only 45 minutes to finish the whole assignment and you certainly want to be smart about how to use your time. (On the list above, the very first item is "Make the

best use of the time you're given.")

Here's a suggestion based on the experience of GED students and their teachers: Give yourself at least five minutes to read the assignment, do your first thinking, and make your first notes. That's just over 10 percent of the total time you have. (For people who like more nearly exact information, it's 11.1 percent.) And even if you used 10 minutes for all this, you'd still have almost 80 percent of the time left. (If you used nine minutes, you'd have exactly 80 percent remaining.)

So if you follow this suggestion you will have approximately 35 to 40 minutes remaining after you've written your first notes.

A Point to Memorize – #1

*Spend 5 to 10 minutes **scoping out the assignment and making notes before** you start to write.*

Moving Ahead

The next four lessons deal with writing the first draft of your essay. After that there's one more lesson and it deals with the last steps such as revising and proofreading.

You'll be working toward a first draft that has many of the qualities readers want to see in a GED essay, including these:

- Responds to the assignment
- Organized with a beginning, middle, and end
- Uses a main idea and supports it
- Is over 200 words long

There are a few more qualities that readers want to see, and you'll take a look at them near the end of this course. But for now focus on these four.

You've already looked at techniques that will help you respond to the assignment, beginning with the simple but crucial step of reading the assignment carefully and going on to make a set of notes.

Now it's time to focus on steps that will help you with the rest of those qualities.

A Mechanical Method

During the late 1960s hundreds of students at one Minnesota high school learned what their teacher called "Mr. Martin's Mechanical Method for Writing a Five Paragraph Paper." The teacher, Bill Martin, gave this name to his version of an approach he'd learned when he was a college freshman. Like most good teachers, he wanted his students to know things and have skills that he himself knew and used. And because he was a gentle and genuinely modest man, Mr. Martin gave the approach a modest and self-effacing name.

- The system you are learning may not be identical to Mr. Martin's Mechanical Method, but it does try for similar results: a five paragraph paper that is clearly organized.

✓Overview of the Mechanical Method

The method actually begins with what you've already learned and practiced. You've been working on a procedure leading to some brief notes. Among other things, those notes will help you use to decide on:

- a big idea that fits the assignment
- three points supporting the big idea

Other ways of expressing the same principle would be to say "Decide on a main idea and three supporting points" or "Develop a thesis statement and three supporting statements." As mentioned earlier, in this course we use "big idea" and "supporting points."

With the big idea and three supporting points established, the Mechanical Methods says draft a five paragraph paper that goes like this:

✓Give the main idea and introduce the three supporting points in the first paragraph

✓Present and develop the first supporting point in paragraph two

✓Do the same for one other supporting point in paragraph three

✓And do the same the final supporting point in paragraph four

✓End the essay in paragraph five

Even though there are a few additional basic points and plenty of fine points to consider, ***this arrangement of the paragraphs is the most vital thing to remember about the Mechanical Method. Remember this and all the rest is much easier.***

A Point to Memorize – #2

Decide on your big idea and three supporting points to use in the Mechanical Method for a Five Paragraph Essay

If you use the Mechanical Method reasonably well, your essay will have more of the qualities that readers want to see. The first paragraph will work as the beginning, the next three will serve as a middle, and the last will be an ending. Beginning, middle, and end might go by different names ? such as introduction, body, and conclusion ? but regardless of the words used to label them, having those three parts will make your essay work well. Putting a main idea and supporting points into words will ensure that they show up in your essay clearly, another quality readers look for. And if you write five paragraphs you're almost certainly going to use over 200 words. [Not counting this sentence and the brackets, this paragraph is 117 words, but with this sentence included it's 139 words.]

✓How the Big Idea and Supporting Points Are Related

During the rest of this course you'll have to think several times about big ideas and supporting points, so it might help to spend some time right now getting them straight. One crucial matter is simply that they should be related. That is, each thing you call a supporting point should be related to the big idea. Then the question comes up: How are they related?

To get a glimpse of different relationships, suppose you read an essay that started with this paragraph:

> **Pain comes from many sources and takes many forms. Every year almost half of all Americans seek treatment for pain, for everything from a finger cut to chronic disease. Of course people want and need safe, successful treatment. That usually will be a combination of attitude, medication, and therapy.**

Using the Mechanical Method, you could imagine this essay going ahead to three paragraphs, one each about attitude, medication, and therapy. You also might imagine a final paragraph that says something more about combinations of them. If you had to identify them from this paragraph alone, you'd probably say the big idea has something to do with recognizing good pain treatment and the supporting points identify three aspects of treatment: attitude, medication, and therapy. [For the record, the paragraph uses 49 words, so if the other paragraphs are about the same, the essay would be plenty long for the GED.]

The paragraph sets this up when it gives three qualities or characteristics of safe, successful treatment. Each quality is ***one part*** of the ***whole treatment***. All kinds of writing deals with ***parts and wholes***.

> **Corn tortillas are essential in a lot of Mexican and Central American cooking. To make authentic ones you have to use the right ingredients, know how to mix and shape them, and know how to cook them. With those basics, you can make fresh, delicious tortillas.**

From this start, you can imagine paragraphs about ingredients, mixing and shaping, and cooking, three parts of the whole business of making tortillas.

A big idea and its supporting points can be related in ways other than whole and parts. The following sentences set up a slightly different relationship.

> **Some people overcome terrible hardships they knew as children and become kind, reliable adults. I can say that about several members of my own family. I also can say all those folks, while they were young, had at least one adult who really helped them along.**

You can imagine this one going on to separate paragraphs about each of the several family members the introduction mentions. (If the essay follows the Mechanical Method, it would deal with three different people.) What's the big idea here? The importance of children having a helpful adult in their lives. The supporting points are ***examples of the main idea***, which is one of the most common and useful ways of all.

The next lesson will show you more ways of connecting big ideas and supporting points and give some other suggestions about writing effective first paragraphs.

Assignment for Lesson 4

✓Part One

Ask someone you trust to cooperate with you in this part of the assignment. In conversation, explain the Mechanical Method to that person and write a short report about the experience.

Before giving your explanation, make a few notes listing the basic points you want to include and the order in which you will cover them. You might also make notes telling yourself what problems you expect.

Write a paragraph or two, covering these points:

- **Who you spoke to**
- **What basic points you decided to cover**
- **Any difficulties you expected to have**

- **How the explanation went**
- **What you'd do differently if you explained the Mechanical Method to someone else**

✓Part Two

In Part Two the assignment for Lesson 3 you wrote a big idea for five different essay topics. These are the topics you wrote about:

1. Studies say that most children spend three hours watching television for every hour they spend in school. What do you think are important consequences of this pattern? Do you think parents should change the television-watching habits of their children? Most of the time it will be best if you write approximately the same amount about each question.
2. Computers have influenced many things about modern life. Describe some ways they have influenced your life. Explain how you have reacted to these influences. You might think of influences on your work, recreation, home life, and relationships.
3. On the average, an American family moves every 4.5 years. Think of someone - maybe you - who's moved three times or more. Describe the moves and tell why they were made. Explain some of the most important changes the moves resulted in. Don't worry if the moves didn't involve a great distance. Focus on what changed.
4. People born since 1970 will change jobs at least six times during their working lives, if current patterns continue. Think of someone - maybe you - who's changed jobs three times or more. Tell about at least three job changes why each was made. Explain some of the most important results of the job changes. You may find this easier if you focus on jobs that you've had for a relatively long time instead of on short-term, temporary ones.
5. Most people can remember times during their childhood when some adult was a very strong influence. Think of a time when that happened to you. Or think of a time when a child you know was strongly influenced by adult. Keep in mind that the influence might have been positive, negative, or mixed.

Go back to your last version of Assignment 3. Find the big ideas you wrote.

For each big idea, write three things you might use as supporting points.

Suppose you used the following sentence as your big idea for #4 above:

My jobs changes feel like a roller coaster because they go up and down so often.

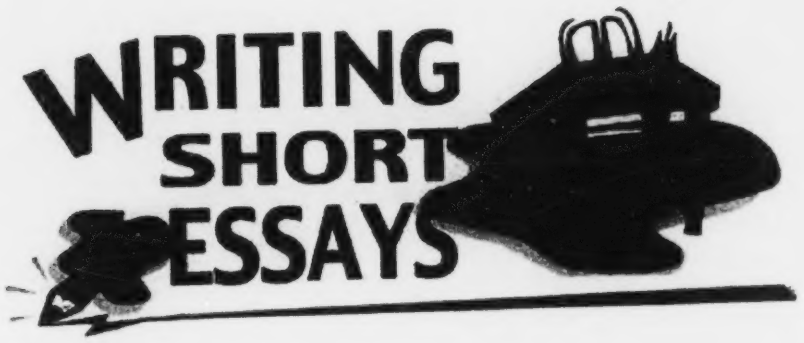
You might use these three examples as supporting points:

Moving up to night manager from assistant manager

Going from night manager back to counter work at another place after the first place went out of business

Moving up to assistant manager after three months of counter work

Clearly label each big idea and its supporting points.



LESSON FIVE

First Paragraph as the Starting Point

The first point you memorized about the Mechanical Method says to spend five to ten minutes thinking over the assignment and making notes before starting to write. When you do that it means you have already been working on your essay before starting to write the first version.

But a reader doesn't directly see you thinking and doesn't see your notes; a reader sees only your essay. And the first thing a reader sees is the beginning of your essay. That makes the beginning crucial, for it is where a reader starts with your work. We have all been told, one way or another, how important it is to get off to a good start in the things we do. Advice-givers tell us "First impressions are lasting impressions." Job advisers tell us "You start communicating the moment you walk in the door." Coaches urge athletes to "Start well and play your game." Music directors rehearse performers to "Use a good attack" on a piece. The same general idea applies to writing a GED essay.

In long piece of writing, the beginning might be very long: two or more paragraphs in a published essay, several pages in a long essay, or even one or more chapters in a book. But in the Mechanical Method's five paragraph GED essay, the first paragraph does the beginning work. All the other paragraphs are related but have different jobs.

The Jobs of the First Paragraph

To get slightly more specific, the first paragraph will get your essay off to a good start if it

- ✓**Shows how you are thinking of the assigned topic**
- ✓**Gives your big idea**
- ✓**Introduces your supporting points**
- ✓**Draws the reader into your writing**

This asks a lot of just one paragraph, which after all may be only a few sentences long. One thing that makes this all possible is that a single sentence might ? and usually will ? contribute to more than one of the jobs. Everything you write shows a reader how and what you are thinking. Everything has some effect on the reader, preferably a positive effect. But individual words, phrases, and sentences may work at more than one job at a time. For instance, how the big idea is expressed will show much about how you're thinking of the topic and often will get your reader interested in your essay too. What you use as supporting points also shows your take on the topic and may be interesting to the reader as well. It is <u>not</u> necessary to have one sentence assigned to each job; in fact, that approach usually isn't a very good one.

The sample paragraphs you saw in the last lesson show some of this more-than-one-thing-at-a-time quality. Here's one of them.

> **Pain comes from many sources and takes many forms. Every year almost half of all Americans seek treatment for pain, for everything from a finger cut to chronic disease. Of course people want and need safe, successful treatment. That usually will be a combination of attitude, medication, and therapy.**

The first two sentences help draw the reader into the essay and start to show how the writer thinks about the topic. The third sentence is the big idea, but it also shows more of the writer's thinking: people both want and need treatment ? treatment should be both safe and successful. The last sentence sets up attitude, medication, and therapy as aspects that will be written about later but also shows the writer thinks they usually come in combinations.

Similar things can be said about this short paragraph:

> **Corn tortillas are essential in a lot of Mexican and Central American cooking. To make authentic ones you have to use the right ingredients, know how to mix and shape them, and know how to cook them. With those basics, you can make fresh, delicious tortillas.**

The first sentence seems devoted to introducing the topic and attracting the reader's attention, but it also shows that the writer knows where corn tortillas are most common. The second sentence sets up ingredients, mixing and shaping, and cooking as the three aspects that will come up later. The third sentence is the big idea: that with a few basics you can make corn tortillas. But it also uses the words *fresh* and *delicious* to attract the reader and to help show that the writer thinks good tortillas are worth a little effort.

✓Showing Your Thought

Just a few paragraphs back you read the sentence ***Everything you write shows a reader how and what you are thinking.*** It's nearly impossible to make separate suggestions about how to show your thought in writing because, as that sentence points out, everything shows. In different words and from a slightly different point of view, readers may use anything about your writing to understand or judge your thinking.

But it's important to remember that the people who read GED essays are specially trained to look for qualities like stating a main idea and using supporting points. These are qualities of writing; they're also qualities of thinking.

✓Stating Your Big Idea

Somewhere in the first paragraph you should have a sentence or two that puts your big idea into words. Beyond that, you have plenty of choices among places to put the big idea and ways of wording it.

The big idea might be put in the very first sentence of the first paragraph, like this:

> Computers have had a huge influence on my life. Their use in gas engines has changed how I do my work. They've given me new ways to communicate with my family and friends. Online sources have added to the places I can find information.

With a couple of modifications, the same big idea could go at the end of the first paragraph, like this:

> I work on gas engines for a living and most of them have computers. Connected computers allow me to use e-mail and other kinds of communication. On the Internet I can get information from places all over the world. All in all, computers have had a huge influence on my life.

In other forms, the big idea could even go near the middle of the first paragraph, although that's not so common as first or last.

> Computers have brought about new gas engines and engine analyzers, e-mail, cell phones, and the World Wide Web. As a result, computers have had a huge influence on me. They've influenced how I make a living, communicate with other people, and get information.

[Although they are short, all of these three examples are in the right neighborhood for a five-paragraph essay over 200 words long. The first example is 44 words, the second 51, and the last 43.]

As you can see, the big idea is worded differently in each version. In part, that's because of where they come in the paragraph and how one sentence fits with others. When it comes first, the sentence usually just states the big idea. When it comes last, the sentence usually sums up what has come before, as with the words "All in all Ö" in the second example. When it comes in the middle, the sentence usually will make some kind of connection to what comes before, after, or both.

The sentence(s) stating the big idea often will use a key word, words, or phrase. "All in all Ö" signals adding things together or summing up. In the second example above, it's the adding up of all the computer applications that the writer mentioned in the first sentence. "As a result Ö" signals showing how or why something happened. In the third example, "As a result Ö" suggests that the things mentioned in sentence one have caused changes in the writer's life.

Key words and phrases can signal many, many different ways of thinking about a big idea. Writing "No matter what you've heard Ö " or "Despite common opinion Ö" clearly signals the essay is going to deal with something contrary to popular belief. Using "Most important of all Ö " or "Above all else Ö " signals dealing with something the writer sees as standing out among several other parts or possibilities. "On the other hand Ö " signals something different or maybe exactly opposite another one.

Key words and phrases can help a reader follow your thoughts and your organization. For instance, using the name "Mechanical Method" for the techniques taught in this course might help students remember that there are definite structures and steps involved: think over and make notes before writing, plan on five paragraphs, have the first paragraph give the big idea and three supporting points for it, and so on.

✓ Introducing Your Supporting Points

In the first paragraph you can do at least two things with your supporting points. First, introduce them to the reader and second, put them in the order you'll use later. Use this paragraph as an example again:

> Computers have brought about new gas engines and engine analyzers, e-mail, cell phones, and the World Wide Web. As a result, computers have had a huge influence on me. They've influenced how I make a living, communicate with other people, and get information.

This opening looks like the essay will go on to say something about computer influences on the writer's job (which may be an auto or truck mechanic), the writer's ways of communicating with other people, and how the writer gets information. And it looks like the job stuff will come first, followed by communication and information gathering. One, two, three. Mechanical.

Although this order is mechanical, there also are choices involved because, quite obviously, those three supporting points (job, communicating, information gathering) can come in any order the writer wants them. A useful question comes up then: When would one order be better than another? As usual, there's no single answer to that question. It depends on what the writer thinks of the topic and wants the reader to notice.

If the writer thinks one supporting point is strongest and most important, it probably should come first. First is considered the strongest position in most essays, based on what readers remember and respond to. In the example above, if influences on the job seem the most important, that should come first.

If the writer thinks the three supporting points fall into a pretty clear one, two, three order of strength or importance, they should come in that order in the essay. In the example, if the writer thinks information gathering

is the most important thing that's been influenced, job second, and communications third, that should be the order. This is an easy arrangement for readers to follow, partly because it directly reflects the writer's thinking.

If two of the supporting points seem about equally important and one less important, the least important should go in the middle. In the example, if the writer thinks influences on communications and information gathering are both strong, and that influences on the job are not as strong, the job stuff should go in the middle. From the point of view of what readers remember and react to, first is the strongest position, last is the next strongest, and the middle is weakest.

Sometimes the supporting points need to be arranged according to something other than importance, though. Suppose the writer of the example about computers thought about his or her experience this way: *First I had to learn to use computer technology at work because so many engines use them, engine analyzers became standard, and locating parts became a computer operation. Then I found myself using computers for getting other information besides work stuff. Before long I discovered the advantages of e-mail and other electronic communication.* In this pattern of thinking, the chronological order ? the time sequence in which things happened ? is vitally important. The points should follow that order.

A Point to Memorize – #3

Decide on the order you want to use for the three supporting points. Put them in that order in paragraph one.

✓Drawing the Reader into Your Writing

Student writers often are told to keep in mind their readers, which is good general advice. In most cases students know, at least somewhat, the people who will read their work: a teacher, other students, or maybe a teaching assistant. A writer can use this knowledge to pick examples, wording, and ideas that will connect with readers.

But in writing a GED essay, you do not know the readers. Keeping them in mind turns into a special situation. You can use what you do know about readers, and you can make some informed guesses too. You know that readers are trained to do GED work and that the training tells them to look for an understanding of the assigned topic, for use of a main idea and supporting points, and for standard spelling, punctuation, and usage. You can probably assume that the reader is a college graduate (maybe with more than one degree), has some teaching experience, and reads quite a bit.

Research about GED essay scoring says that a reader usually spends three to four minutes reaching a decision, so your best bet is to focus on what readers are trained to look for and not worry about how dramatic or original your essay is. You will draw in these trained readers if your writing has the qualities they are trained to look for.

Assignment for Lesson 5

✓Part One

In the last assignment, for Lesson 4, you came up with a big idea and three supporting points for five essay topics.

Now pick what you did for three of those topics. Pick the ones you feel most confident of or are most interested in.

Write a first paragraph for each of them. Keep in mind what general jobs a first paragraph should do:

- **✓Shows how you are thinking of the assigned topic**

✓**Gives your big idea**

✓**Introduces your supporting points**

✓**Draws the reader into your writing**

If you want to, change the big idea or supporting points. But if you do that, clearly label the new version so your teacher will notice it.

✓Part Two

Now take each of the paragraphs you wrote for Part One and label the big idea and the three supporting points. Use some very clear kind of visual aid for the labels, such as these:

[The big idea is in the next sentence] ? Brackets plus color

The big idea is in the next sentence ? Contrasting color

The big idea is in the next sentence ? Bold and italic

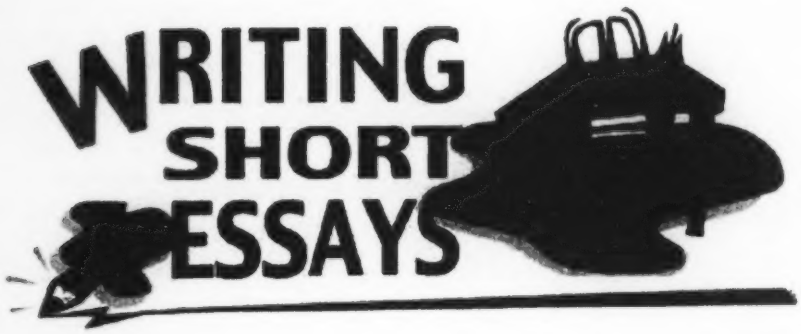
The big idea is in the next sentence ? Bold and underlined

Your paragraph should look something like this after you have labeled the big idea:

> Computers have brought about new gas engines and engine analyzers, e-mail, cell phones, and the World Wide Web. [The big idea is in the next sentence] As a result, computers have had a huge influence on me. They've influenced how I make a living, communicate with other people, and get information.

✓Part Three

Remember the GED hitlist you started in Lesson 1? It's time to take a look at that list again. Either send the list to your teacher through e-mail or sit down with your teacher and go over the list. Ask your teacher to suggest other things to add to your list of problems you promise yourself you **will not have** when you write your GED essay.



LESSON SIX

Paragraphs Two, Three, and Four

Even though you are now well past the halfway point in this course, the course has specifically covered only the preparations for writing and the first paragraph of the Mechanical Method's five paragraph essay. However, there's a reason for this arrangement: if you're like most writers, getting started is the hardest part. Put in a more positive way, once you get started the rest goes along more easily.

Put into the words of the Mechanical Method, after you get the first paragraph worked out, you have a good start on the next three. That's because in the process of writing paragraph one you decided what the next three paragraphs will be about and the order in which they'll come.

The Job of Paragraphs Two, Three, and Four

The next three paragraphs have two jobs that they share with everything in the essay: showing how you are thinking and drawing the reader into your work. At the same time, each of them has the crucial job of developing one supporting point.

The key idea here comes in the word "developing." What does ? or what may ? "developing" include? To get at some answers, look at one of the paragraphs used in Lesson 5 but now followed by a second paragraph:

> Computers have had a huge influence on my life. Their use in gas engines has changed how I do my work. They've given me new ways to communicate with my family and friends. Online sources have added to the places I can find information.
>
> When I started working as a car and truck mechanic, almost 20 years ago, most engines still had carburetors for mixing fuel and used mechanical points in distributors. Back then doing an engine tune-up meant using a timing light and doing lots of listening. Now engines use fuel injection systems worked by small computers and electronic ignitions. So today tuning an engine means using an analyzer, a computer really, that monitors several things at a time. I've had to learn to use the analyzers, how to replace electronic components, and how to explain these things to customers.

[Just so you can keep track of how this essay is going along, the first two paragraphs add up to 141 words. At this rate, the finished version will be plenty long for a GED essay.]

The added paragraph *tells more about the supporting point.* It's similar to what you might do if you were talking with another person instead of writing. Your listener might say, "Tell me more," and you'd go right ahead to do that.

Clearly, telling more is not just repeating what's already been written or said. It would kill a conversation if you repeated yourself every time someone asked to hear more. Likewise, it can kill a piece of writing. Telling more

means adding. This process of adding sometimes gets called *expanding* or *elaborating*, as in the phrases "expanding on a point" or "elaborating a point."

In the example the second paragraph adds quite a few things to the basic point that computers have changed the writer's work. For one thing, the first sentence shows that the writer is a car and truck mechanic and has been for almost 20 years. In turn, mentioning the approximately 20 year career gives a time context for what the writer describes. The first sentence also mentions now-old-fashioned carburetors and distributor points and sets up the next three sentences, which give a short series of details about how doing engine tune-ups have changed. The last sentence mentions three things the writer has had to learn, the last one involving communication with customers.

The second paragraph does much of its work by adding details and examples. Details about the writer's job get added; examples of computer applications in gas engines are added as well. The details and examples add a great deal to this short paragraph and the whole essay. No wonder, then, that teachers so often tell students to use details and to provide examples.

The quality of details and examples is important too. One important quality is relevance, meaning that details and examples clearly related to the point. It's the quality people mean when the say "Stick to the point." And of course, that's another comment that teachers often make.

The opposite of relevance is irrelevance, which means unrelated to the point. A detail may be true but not relevant. For example if the sample second paragraph had the sentence *I've had the same boss for all the years I've worked, and obviously we get along all right*, a reasonable reader would ask "What does that have to do with how computers have influenced your life?"

A Point to Memorize – #4

In each paragraph about a supporting point, use relevant details or examples. Most of the time, use three to five of them.

Going on to a New Paragraph

By now you undoubtedly have the Mechanical Method's idea in your mind: paragraph three develops ? that is, it *adds to* or *expands* or *elaborates* ? the second supporting point.

In the sample essay, the second supporting point is that computers have given the writer new ways to communicate with family and friends. So a third paragraph could go like this:

> After getting used to computers at work I found out there were plenty of ways to use them for personal reasons too. I learned to use a word processor, which was nice for me because my handwriting is almost impossible to read. That made it much easier to exchange letters with my brother who lives in Seattle and my sister in Portland. Now all three of us use e-mail, so it's even easier. I've been sending e-mail birthday notes to about 15 different people, some family members and some friends. I know I could do my own Web page because I helped set up the one at work, but decided not to. They're too impersonal for me.

[This paragraph adds 117 words to the essay, so now the total is 258 words. The essay already meets the assignment for length.]

The first sentence in this paragraph uses a special little touch that helps the essay flow along. The sentence makes a brief reference back to the second paragraph ? which is about using computers at work ? and another reference to what is coming up in the rest of the third paragraph ? which is about using computers for personal communication. In other words, the sentence helps ***make the transition*** from paragraph two to paragraph three. Transitions help move from one point to another, but at the same time show how the points are connected. The

paragraph could go without the first sentence, but the shift from the preceding one would seem much more abrupt or even disconnected.

✓Transition to a Fourth Paragraph

Because experience at work seems to be how the writer got started using computers and was mentioned in both paragraph two and paragraph three, another reference to that might make a good transition into number four. For instance the following paragraph starts with a reference to computer data bases used on the job, the general topic of paragraph two. The sentence also mentions the Internet, which was written about in paragraph three.

> Other experience on the job introduced me to using computer data bases, some on our own system and some on the Internet. Our parts inventory is all on computer now, for instance. After getting my own Internet service I started to use online sources for information about gardening, fishing, and Korean War history, which are my main interests. I also use online information to plan travel routes, make campground reservations, and get weather forecasts.

[With this paragraph added, the essay now has 332 words.]

As usual, details and examples are used to develop the point. The writer mentions getting online information for three personal interests (gardening, fishing, and Korean War history) and for three more purposes (travel routes, campground reservations, and weather forecasts).

Now there's only one more paragraph to go, and that's the topic of the next lesson.

Assignment for Lesson 6

You probably have seen the pattern developing in the last few assignments. In Assignment 3 you wrote five big ideas, and since then each assignment has added some step in the Mechanical Method. You wrote supporting points for five essay topics, and then you wrote first paragraphs for three of those.

✓Part One

Now it's time to write paragraphs that develop a supporting point. Remember that the reading told you to use relevant details or examples for each supporting point; the reading suggested using three to five of them in a paragraph.

Pick any two the three beginning paragraphs you wrote in Assignment Five.

Decide on the relevant details or examples you will use for each supporting point in one of the essays.

Then write a paragraph for each of those supporting points.

Then decide on the details or examples and write the paragraphs for the second essay.

[As you can see, you'll write a total of six new paragraphs. After finishing this assignment, you will have two essays going and will have four paragraphs done for each of them.]

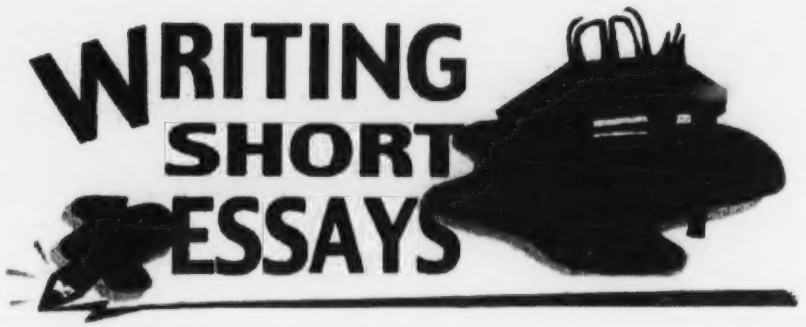
✓Part Two

During the course you've come across four different boxes labeled "**A Point to Memorize**."

List the four points. Quote them exactly.

Try writing out the points from memory or telling them to another person, also from memory.

Write a paragraph reporting how well you're doing with memorizing the points. Explain your plan for finishing the memorization.



LESSON SEVEN

Ending the Essay

For almost everyone it takes careful work to end a piece of writing effectively; for some people writing an ending turns into a big problem. All this applies to writing the GED essay where several aspects, usually in combinations, can complicate decisions about how or even when to end.

For one thing, there is a time limit for working on the essay. Getting stuck at any point along the way can cause trouble, but getting stuck on an ending can be especially frustrating. To see how the time limit might work out, suppose a writer used this time schedule for the 45 minutes allowed:

- **Part 1: Read and think over the assignment; make notes ? 5 to 10 minutes**
- **Part 2: Write the first draft of the entire essay ? 20 to 25 minutes**
- **Part 3: Review, proofread, revise, and finish ? 10 to 15 minutes**

Obviously, there has to be some give-and-take within this schedule. If the writer takes the maximum for parts one and two, there will be only 10 minutes for the last part. But this time plan could work well for most writers.

The point here is that getting stuck on drafting the last paragraph for an extra five minutes would leave very little time for the important last steps in part three.

Another aspect, closely related to the time limit, is that the GED essay is a short piece of writing. Because of that, some of the traditional advice about how to end an essay just doesn't make a lot of sense. For instance, writers often are advised to summarize or restate their main points in a conclusion. But most GED essays will be two, perhaps three handwritten pages long and won't need a full summary or restatement. As mentioned earlier, readers spend only five minutes or so with an essay, hardly long enough to forget main points.

Then too, many people come up with new thoughts ? sometimes very unexpected ones ? as they write and add them at the end. Although new thoughts are often welcome, when they come at the end they can take an essay off on a new, unexplored path.

Looking at Three Ineffective Endings

To see examples of ineffective endings, recall the sample essay used in the last two lessons. At the end of Lesson 6, the sample first draft was through paragraph four:

> Computers have had a huge influence on my life. Their use in gas engines has changed how I do my work. They've given me new ways to communicate with my family and friends. Online sources have added to the places I can find information.
>
> When I started working as a car and truck mechanic, almost 20 years ago, most engines still had carburetors for mixing fuel and used mechanical points in distributors. Back then doing an engine tune-up meant using a timing light and doing lots of listening. Now engines use fuel injection systems worked by small computers and electronic ignitions. So today tuning an engine means using an analyzer, a computer really, that monitors several things at a time. I've had to learn to use the analyzers, how to replace electronic components, and how to explain these things to customers.
>
> After getting used to computers at work I found out there were plenty of ways to use them for personal reasons too. I learned to use a word processor, which was nice for me because my handwriting is almost impossible to read. That made it much easier to exchange letters with my brother who lives in Seattle and my sister in Portland. Now all three of us use e-mail, so it's even easier. I've been sending e-mail birthday notes to about 15 different people, some family members and some friends. I know I could do my own Web page because I helped set up the one at work, but decided not to. They're too impersonal for me.
>
> Other experience on the job introduced me to using computer data bases, some on our own system and some on the Internet. Our parts inventory is all on computer now, for instance. After getting my own Internet service I started to use online sources for information about gardening, fishing, and Korean War history, which are my main interests. I also use online information to plan travel routes, make campground reservations, and get weather forecasts.

Now look at a not-very-effective concluding paragraph, one that restates points from earlier in the essay and with some unnecessary words.

> In conclusion, I've pointed out that computers have influenced three different parts of my life. I do my job differently, I communicate with my family and friends using computers, and I get information from new sources. I have given examples of each of those influences.

Using "In conclusion" doesn't add much to the paragraph; neither does telling the reader "I have given examples of each of those influences."

Another closing paragraph, also not effective, takes the essay off in a new direction. It might be a very interesting or important one. But the essay won't go any farther in that direction simply because it is at the end, so the new thought just confuses or tantalizes a reader.

> Learning new things really builds my self-image. There was a time when I didn't think I could learn much. But my experience with computers has changed all that.

This ending might make an effective *opening* to an essay about building self-confidence through learning new things. (In fact, some experienced writers routinely look at the last part of a first draft for ideas about reorganizing a piece of writing. The GED essay's time limit doesn't allow for big reorganization of the first draft, but you might want to remember this technique and try it in some other writing.)

The next ending paragraph illustrates another ineffective approach that some people use when writing an essay test ? the GED essay, for instance.

> I'm not sure if this is what you were looking for, but it's the best I could do in the time I had. I don't do much writing, so it takes me a long time. If I had more time I would have written about some ways that

computers have made my life miserable too.

This ending combines apology, new thoughts about the topic, and maybe some complaint about the time limit. The apology isn't needed at all. GED readers know about the time limit, that writers do the best they can, and that most people don't write very often. In addition, the apology doesn't go very well with the rest of the essay, which seems confident and clear. And of course, the additional and interesting idea ? some ways that computers can make life miserable ? has to go undeveloped at this point.

✓What Might Work Better?

The most important rule for ending your GED essay is much like the traditional rule for medical care: ***first, do no harm***. If you have written four good paragraphs that introduce a main idea and develop three supporting points, don't mess them up with an ineffective final paragraph.

For the GED essay, a short, simple paragraph will do the job in almost all cases. It should be connected to what came before and also signal the end is here.

It may be as short as one mature sentence that reminds the reader of the supporting points:

> Because of computers, I do my job differently, can use Internet services to stay in touch with my family and friends, and can get at new sources of information online.

This sentence clearly gives the impression "This is all I have to say for now" as well as reviewing the supporting points.

[Some teachers object to one sentence paragraphs, but GED essay readers won't mark down if the sentence works reasonably well.]

A different final paragraph might use an unnoticed thread that runs through the essay, such as this:

> What I had to do at work got me started using computers. That experience helped me learn other uses. I look forward to learning even more.

This paragraph points out a path the writer followed in learning to use computers, a path that started at his work place. And once again, the paragraph definitely has that feeling of "This is the end" about it.

Including a sentence similar in meaning to "I look forward to learning even more" can be an effective way to end many GED essays. That's because many GED assignments deal with learning of some kind: learning how to do something, finding out something about other people or yourself, reaching a conclusion about some experience. So a writer often can honestly say "There's much more to learn about this" and a reader will accept that as a natural conclusion. The whole paragraph will have to connect to the rest of the essay, of course.

✓If Nothing Else Works, Consider This

If you can't write a final paragraph that satisfies you after trying two or three possibilities, it might be best to go without one. Even though the Mechanical Method does say to use five paragraphs, that's not an unbreakable rule. The goal is to write an essay that earns a passing score and there are many legitimate ways to do that. And it's important to remember that the GED test does <u>not</u> require a specific number of paragraphs.

If at least three of the following things are true for you, it's probably all right to go without a fifth paragraph:

> ✓You're running short of time and might have less than ten minutes to go over your work before handing it in.
>
> ✓You feel satisfied that you have a big idea and supporting points clearly stated in paragraph one.

✓You're satisfied that paragraphs two, three, and four do a good job of developing the supporting points.

✓You know that you usually can improve your work when you go back over it.
The paragraphs seems connected to each other when you read them to yourself.

Assignment for Lesson 7

✓Part One

At this point you have two essays in progress. You've written four paragraphs for each of them, and you've probably made some revisions too.

The next assignment is obvious:

Write a final paragraph for each of the two essays.

Keep in mind that a final paragraph for a test essay such as the GED should be short, refer to the big idea and its supporting points, and give the feeling "that's all for now."

✓Part Two

The reading for the lesson warns against some ineffective ways to conclude an essay:

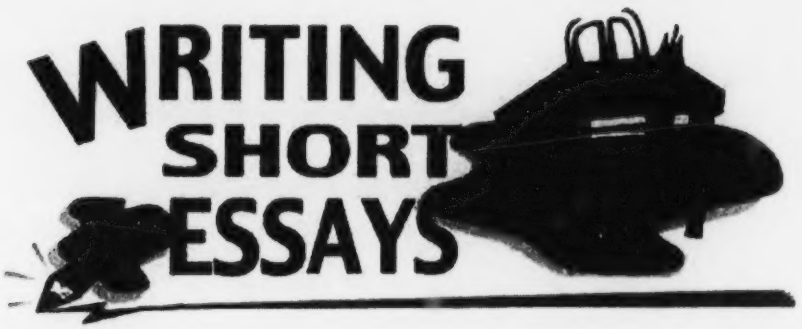
- Repeating earlier sentences but adding unnecessary words
- Adding a new idea that can't be developed
- Apologizing for your work
- Complaining about about the assignment

Pick one of these four.

Imagine that you're explaining the problem to someone you know.

Write the explanation in one or two paragraphs.

Try to use an example of the problem.



LESSON EIGHT

Finishing Your Work

In earlier lessons you've read the suggestion to spend a few minutes reviewing, proofreading, and revising the first version of your essay. Small improvements made before handing in your essay can add a lot. Exactly what improvements to make depends entirely on what the first version is like, but in general these end-of-the-job changes are finishing touches rather than basic construction. For convenience sake, think of these as revisions and corrections.

When reviewing your GED essay, you need some frame of reference to help you out, and the best one is your own writing experience. **Check your essay for the kinds of problems you know you have had in the past. Correct or avoid those problems before worrying about any others.**

That's exactly why you have been keeping track of the improvements and corrections your teacher has told you to make during the this course along with suggestions or directions you got from other readers. What you have learned from doing this gives you the basic ideas for reviewing and improving your essay. Additional ideas might occur to you if , as suggested earlier in the course, you keep in mind what the multiple choice part of the GED English examination tests deals with. Think of it this way: when you write the essay for Part 2 you should follow the standards implied by Part 1.

Because the GED essay is written on the spot and as a test, some other practical matters become important including handwriting, arrangement on the page, and legibility. When you are writing something other than a test, you often will use a computer, which eliminates many of these problems. Word processing applications have tools that can cut down on spelling, mechanical, and even some usage or grammar problems, too. It can make quite a difference to work without these tools, as you will in the GED exam. But even without them, you will want to end up with an essay that's as clear and legible as possible.

GED readers are told that difficult-to-read handwriting and messy appearance should not be taken into account when scoring an essay, so you can depend on them to be much more tolerant than untrained readers. At the same time, handwriting and appearance can be so messy that even very patient readers will get frustrated or give up.

In addition, your review should look at whether you have used the Mechanical Method's basic structure: state the big idea, introduce three supporting points, and develop each supporting point.

Checklist: The Review Tool

Everything about how and why the GED essay is written makes it important to have a checklist for reviewing

your work. The essay is an important step, taken under test conditions including a time limit. That calls for an efficient way to review. And checklists can be very efficient.

One way to make your checklist is as a series of questions that you want to have answered "NO." For example:

- Do I use any run-on sentences?
- Are there any incomplete sentences?
- Are words misspelled?
- Are there punctuation mistakes?
- Any capitalization errors?
- Is the big idea unclear?

Or you could use a series of questions you want to have answered "YES."

- Is it free of run-on sentences?
- Are sentences complete?
- Is all spelling correct?
- Is the punctuation all right?
- Is capitalization correct?
- Is the big idea clear?

Of course, you could use statements instead of questions, yet cover the same ground. For instance, a set of statements you want to agree with:

- No run-on sentences
- Complete sentences
- Correct spelling
- Standard punctuation
- Correct capitalization
- Big idea clearly stated

Most checklists are set up so that the wanted answer is positive, using natural answers like *OK, Right, Yes,* or *Check*. There seems to be something psychologically satisfying about getting all those positives.

Take Time to Read

Reviewing a test essay requires a very special kind of reading. Take enough time to read slowly ? or even better, *very slowly*. Consciously go slower than you do when reading someone else's writing. Combine the slowness with careful attention.

Professional proofreaders ? who work for book publishers, magazines, or newspapers for instance ? use

techniques that slow down their reading and increase their concentration. One is using a ruler or blank sheet of paper to move down the page. Another is moving a finger along under the words. Another is saying the words to themselves, "under the breath." (Some reading specialists call this "subvocalizing.") All of these are considered poor habits for everyday reading, mostly because they slow down the process. But of course, that's exactly what's needed when reading to notice details.

You could use one or more of those techniques when you review your essay.

Do What You Know is Right

In this case, doing what you know is right doesn't refer to an ethical decision. It means do what you are sure of, what you are confident of, before doing things you're not so sure of. You may have learned the same general principle in connection with taking a multiple choice test. It goes like this:

Say you're taking a test with 25 total questions and you have ten minutes to spend on the. You answer the first four confidently. (And let's say that every time you answer confidently, the answer is right.) You come to number five and you're not sure. What's the best strategy?

You should mark number five so you can find it easily later on, but then skip over it for the time being. Go on to number six, and let's say you answer it and two more questions (numbers seven and eight) before not feeling sure again, at number nine. You mark that one and go ahead to answer number ten. You answer seven more questions, feeling pretty sure of each of them.

You can see why that strategy can pay off. If you let yourself get stuck on the first question you're unsure of, you'd get only four right answers.

If you skip number five and get the next three right but get stuck there, you'd still get only seven right answers.

If you skip number nine, get the next eight right, and get stuck there, your total is now fifteen correct.

You can see that the best general strategy is to go through all the questions, answering the ones you're sure of and skipping the others. After you get through, you go back to the ones you skipped and try to figure them out.

When it comes to reviewing your essay instead of answering multiple choice questions, the principle still applies. When you spot something that needs to be changed, *and you feel confident of how to change it*, make the change, then go on to the next point. If you feel confident of how to change that one, do it; if you're so sure, mark the spot, and go ahead. Be sure to go through the entire essay, taking care of the changes you feel sure of first of all. Then go back to the other ones.

✓Keeping Within the Time Limit

Doing a careful review and making some improvements may sound like a long job. But think of a few facts and assumptions:

Your essay is supposed to be at least 250 words long. Chances are it will be longer than that, but it probably won't be 500 words. Let's assume it's 400 words.

Many adults read general material (say a newspaper or magazine) at a rate of 300 to 600 words per minute.

So a very slow and careful reading might be 100 to 200 words per minute. For your 400 word essay, that means two to four minutes reading time.

And let's say you want to correct five things and each change takes one minute. Five minutes.

Four minutes to review it, five minutes to improve it. Total: nine minutes.

Finally, think back to the overall schedule worked through in Lesson 7:

- ✓**Part 1: Read and think over the assignment; make notes ? 5 to 10 minutes**
- ✓**Part 2: Write the first draft of the entire essay ? 20 to 25 minutes**
- ✓**Part 3: Review, proofread, revise, and finish ? 10 to 15 minutes**

The example adds up to nine minutes work; the schedule calls for 10 to 15 minutes.

Assignment for Lesson 8

✓Part One

Through most of this course you have been keeping track of the improvements and corrections you've made in your writing. You've done this so that you can have a mental checklist when reviewing your GED essay. A big part of the review involves looking for the kinds of problems you have had in the past. As the reading says, it is a good idea to "Correct or avoid those problems before worrying about any others."

Now it's time to decide what to have on your mental checklist.

Go back over the notes you have made along the way.

Build a checklist of single words or short phrases that remind what to look for when reviewing an essay. [Look at the examples in the lesson.]

Be realistic about how many items you have on your checklist. You have to keep the list in your memory.

Arrange the list in order of importance; put the most important at the beginning.

Write a paragraph or two explaining your checklist.

Send the checklist and the explanation to your teacher.

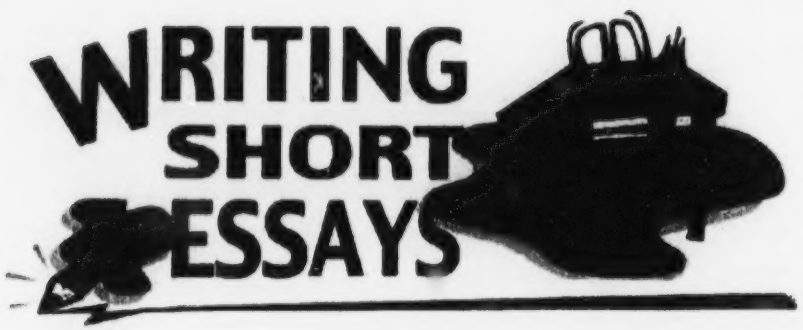
✓Part Two

It's a good idea to read slowly and carefully when you review your own writing.

Decide on one or two techniques you will use to make yourself read slowly and carefully.

Think about how your checklist will fit into this slow, careful reading.

Write a paragraph (or more) telling what you decided and what you thought of.



LESSON NINE

Some Highlights of the Process

Everything in this course is aimed at helping you prepare for the essay part of the GED examinations. You've gotten some information, some explanations, and some suggestions along the way, including major points like these:

- ✓Make the best use of the time you're given (45 minutes)
- ✓Identify and understand the topic you're assigned to write about
- ✓Recognize what invitations or limits the assignment makes
- ✓Make decisions about how you will treat the topic
- ✓Choose main points and supporting details
- ✓Draft and arrange your essay
- ✓End your essay effectively
- ✓Check and improve your work before running out of time
- ✓Most essay assignments tell you to either explain a situation or give your opinion on some statement
- ✓Go into the exam planning to spend 5 to 10 minutes reading the assignment and thinking it over, 20 to 25 minutes writing a first draft of the entire essay, and 10 to 15 minutes reviewing and improving the first version
- ✓Use the Mechanical Method for a Five Paragraph Essay: a first paragraph that states the big idea and introduces three supporting points, followed a paragraph developing each supporting point, and ending with a short final paragraph
- ✓Use a mental checklist to focus your attention when reviewing your essay

Practicing Under Test Conditions

Test conditions include the 45 minute time limit, getting the assigned topic when the exam starts, working

without reference books or notes, working with other people in the room (such as other students or proctors who supervise the exam), and feeling stress from any number of sources.

It can be very useful to practice under test conditions, or at least under as many of those conditions as possible. You certainly can time a practice session and imitate the 45 minute limit. You can replicate getting the assigned topic at the start of the time period, for example by drawing from a list or having your teacher send the assignment options at an agreed on time. You can simply decide to work without reference materials or notes. You might even have someone play the part of a proctor. Some students even have gone to a library to do their practice in a place similar to a GED test site. Although the real thing may still cause more stress than a practice session, you will still profit from timed, controlled practice.

Final Assignment

✓Part One

Plan a practice session in which you imitate as many test conditions as you can.

- ✓Time yourself ? or have someone else time you. Allow 45 minutes
- ✓Don't use any reference or helping materials
- ✓Write on lined paper; use a regular pencil or pen
- ✓Try to find a place that reminds you of a test site (a library, schoolroom, or office)

Get your topic or list of topics from your teacher; don't study them ahead of time.

Use the Mechanical Method and other suggestions from the course.

Finish your essay.

Write down how long you took, count the number of words, and write some notes about how the session went.

Ask your teacher what kind of copy you should send or turn in. Some teachers prefer a copy of the handwritten essay; some want you to provide a word processor version; some want both.

✓Part Two

Write two paragraphs (or more) commenting on these things:

- Your general reaction to the practice session
- What you thought of the Mechanical Method in this session
- What you might try to do differently next time
- What you will do the same way next time

✓Part Three

Take out your GED hitlist again. Have your teacher review your practice essay and check for the problems you've identified on your list.